



How Lady Astor Won Her Seat in Parliament

Swift Shots of Wit and Quick Retorts Which Astonished Her Audiences and Confused the Slow-Moving Minds of Those Who Tried to Heckle Her

LADY "NANCY" ASTOR, an American woman, with her quick wit, convincing retorts, ready repartee and pleasing personality, jolly well did something that no English woman ever did—she got herself elected to the British House of Commons.

Lady Astor is now, as everybody knows, a member of the British Parliament, elected recently to succeed her husband, Viscount Waldorf Astor. Progressive American women are pointing with pride to her, for she is the first American woman to enter the political field abroad. And, of course, everybody in Virginia is tickled, for they still have fond recollections of her as Nancy, one of the famous beautiful Langhorne sisters.

While soliciting the suffrage of her fellow citizens of Plymouth she stood before her audiences like a trained campaigner, asserting her views and policies and then deftly and convincingly answering all sorts of questions from all sorts of hecklers. Men who rallied at the venturesome woman, and women who viewed her with jealous scorn, took delight in hurling questions and remarks, many of them unfair, at her, but she turned the other cheek always and then smote back in a way that always quieted, and usually satisfied, her tormentors. Charwomen and fishmongers snapped at her on account of her wealth, but her answers never failed to appease them. She always had an answer for any heckler which left him or her no foothold for further attack.

She got so many laughs out of her campaign that hardened politicians stared in amazement. It was all new to them. They had been accustomed to seeing seasoned campaigners put to rout by the hecklers in the audience, but here was a refined, dignified little woman, unused to the environment in which she had placed herself and with no experience in electioneering, quickly and easily turning away the barbed shafts directed at her. All during her campaign English audiences got a good idea of what American wit it.

One of the first speeches that she made was at a large engineering works, and when she arrived there she found that Mr. Isaac Foot, her adversary, was in the midst of a speech there. "I know that Lady Astor is a great favorite with the children of Plymouth, but I have one advantage over her so far as they are concerned," he was boasting.

"You mean you have one more?" asked Lady Astor, unable to resist the temptation of a passage at arms with him on this point.

Mr. Foot, the father of seven, bowed courteously to Lady Astor, the mother of six.

The audience looked at Lady Astor with a "thumbs down" expression, but she had only allowed Mr. Foot to put his foot in it. "Yes," was her ready retort, "but I have not finished yet."

Lady Astor finally took the rostrum, but before long became annoyed by a persistent Labor heckler.

"I am getting fed up with these paid agitators," she exclaimed, "come up to the front and let the crowd see what a real Labor man looks like."

When a young man with a velour hat, smart overcoat, silk tie, white scarf and gloves and a silver-mounted walking stick stepped up forward, she said:

"Just what I thought! Better dressed than any of the people voting for Lady Astor," and that settled that young man.

A little later a woman pushed her way through the crowd and, planting herself in front of Lady Astor, declared: "No vote of mine will go to you. At the first meeting you ever addressed in Plymouth, when I called out 'Three cheers for Lloyd George' you dared to call me a virago."

"Perhaps you are," quietly answered Lady Astor.

"You are no lady; you do not behave as one," retorted the woman.

"That is right," said Lady Astor, "I am just an ordinary working woman, but you cannot persuade the women of Plymouth that I am rude, for they know I have had insults hurled at me. I have not been rude to anyone. I apologize for calling you a virago."

The irate woman declined to accept the apology.

"You will not forgive me?" queried Lady Astor. "Wait until you want to be forgiven for your sins," and again Lady Astor had the last word.

"Is not your place in America, Madam?" demanded a smart young woman in sport coat and cape.

"Do not think for one moment that I am not proud of my Virginian blood," rang out Lady Astor's voice. "I married over here in England. What is it you want me to do—stay at home and do nothing except be a Viscountess?"

A man in the audience began to use abusive language to her. Promptly Lady Astor said: "I want every woman in this

audience to see that this man does not vote for me. I do not want the vote of a man who curses a woman when he is sober."

There were several distinctly lively duels between the woman candidate and some of the women. When the interruptions began to come thick and fast, on top of one another Lady Astor said:

"Be quiet, ladies; you are really getting as bad as the men."

In another speech before a large audience she was getting so many laughs from her hearers that she suddenly switched her tactics and assured them: "But when I reach Parliament I shall behave with dignity." But her sober moment soon passed and she said smilingly: "And I promise not to pull the leg of the House of Commons any oftener than I can help."

At that the women laughed until they had to hold their sides. Lady Astor observed them and then protested, with a pout: "But you know, it will be awfully difficult for a woman with my sense of humor to sit there and be quiet."

The laugh was always with and not against her. "You can begin to insult me in a moment," she said to one interrupter. "I will take it all. I am getting immune to it." A woman shouted: "Would you live on two pounds a week?" Lady Astor replied: "No, but would you?"

"Are there no social reforms in America you could give your time to?" asked another. Quickly and sharply came the reply, "I consider that the likes of you ought to be only too glad to have got an American woman who will fight for what is right."

As a campaigner she showed herself a master of the various well known wiles and arts and diplomatic resourcefulness for getting votes. At one time she flattered her chief opponent, Mr. Foot, before a large audience of people when she happened to meet him. She went up to him with a smile, which is said to be the best agent a candidate ever possessed, offered her hand and said to him: "You know, Mr. Foot, I wish I were not fighting against you, because I do really like you." This remark proved that while Lady Astor was born an American she was not brought up in American politics.

Before an audience of men one day she said, tactfully, "I think it is rather hard for men to have to vote for a woman,

and I appreciate how difficult it is."

At times she resorted to feminine sinuosity. Picking out a man in the audience, she addressed her remarks to him. "Can you trust a woman? I'll bet a woman has had more influence with you than any man has had."

"They say also that I am one of the idle rich, but I'll bet that I have done more work in the last five years than the Labor orators," and all the audience, remembering her unfaltering work in the hospitals during the war, applauded her to the echo.

Again attacking the Independent Labor party, she said: "These Labor party orators are no more working men than I am a charwoman. If you vote for me you vote for one of the most independent people ever sent to the House of Commons. I don't expect to turn it into a House of Angels. It's all men there now, and looking into you men's faces I don't see angels."

"I would love to see the policy adopted of taxing war profits to pay for the war, and if it is feasible and possible I hope that the Government will do it. My view of the war profiteer is that I would like to save his soul, but not his fortune."

She looked in at the sergeants' mess in the Citadel barracks. "While I am here," she said, "I do want to ask you to take a little more care of the drummer boys' teeth. Why don't you see that they use their tooth brushes on their teeth instead of on their buttons?"

At one big evening rally there were the usual remarks about American millions. "I'll guarantee if those wild-eyed Bolshevik men had as much as I had," was

Lady Astor's reply, "they'd be living in that palace of mine they're always talking about, and not standing here in the snow, a candidate for Parliament."

At another time, upon leaving a rally, she became engaged in merry rally with Mr. Foot, who happened to meet her outside the hall and who escorted her gallantly to her carriage. "I cannot ask you into the carriage, Mr. Foot," said Lady Astor, smilingly, "because you might spoil my election prospects."

Then she turned to the crowd that had gathered around the carriage and added roguishly, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Liberal candidate is going to make a speech on the necessity of having women in Parliament. Now, Mr. Foot!"

More than once Lady Astor talked along these lines: "It is not as the wife of an M. P., nor as a sex candidate, nor as a warming-pan, but as a citizen, honored beyond measure by an invitation to represent this town, that I come before you. I know that I shall have to fight against prejudice. Many of my own friends are saying, 'Nancy should stay at home and look after her children.' Well, no children in the world are better looked after than mine, and the women who talked like that are the shirkers."

One day she paid an unexpected visit to the sergeants' mess at the marine barracks, and accepted an invitation to enter. The assembled sergeants politely put down their pints of beer to give a courteous hearing to the first candidate for Parliament who had ever invaded their quarters. In the course of her remarks to the marines she said: "I do not believe that you want these long-haired, wild-eyed men who yell about the rights of workmen and have never done a day's work in their lives to have their way." The marines smiled back, and seemed to be immensely tickled by the novelty of the situation. A provost sergeant asked what Lady Astor had done for the navy. Lady Astor looked a trifle dubious.

"I do not know that I ought to tell without the reporters here," she replied, "but I will tell you by yourself." She then led the sergeant into a corner and entered into a whispered conversation. "Good-by, boys; I know you want to get back to your beer and smoking," she said after returning the sergeant to his comrades. She added: "Unless, of course, you would like me to give a temperance lecture."

A red-haired sergeant seized the opportunity and the woman candidate did not evade the challenge. "I do not believe in forced anything," said Lady Astor. "I do not believe that forced prohibition would make sober people, but I do believe that in the time to come the country will be asked to choose between three things—just leaving things as they are, local option and total prohibition. Now is that square?"

A sergeant said: "But you are supposed to be a pussyfoot." (Pussyfoot is a term for prohibitionist in England.)

"Yes, and I am supposed to be an idle rich woman and lots of other things," retorted Lady Astor. "Plymouth, however, knows better than that."

In a speech which she made before a select audience of the upper classes Lady Astor waxed epigrammatic. For instance:

"I am not a man of words; I am a woman of action."

"Our gallant dead did not lay down their lives for a higher wage."

"You cannot take your politics into religion, but you can take your religion into politics."

"I cannot imagine a more terrible prospect than the House of Commons composed of women, but I believe in co-operation. You have to have both men and women to make a thing perfect."

"I am longing for Socialism, but I want the Socialism of Christ, not the Socialism of the Independent Labor Party."

"It has been said electricity was always there, but it took Edison to discover it. It is the same with the hearts of men and women. The good is always there if only we bring it out."

Mrs. Nancy Langhorne Astor and Some Snap-Shot Photographs During Her Energetic Campaign Which Won Her a Seat in the British House of Commons.



Earnest, Vigorous, Quick Witted, but Never Cross or Impatient in Her Campaigning.